

## **NATURAL RESOURCES - WILDLIFE AND PLANT HABITAT**

### **Town of Eastham Goals and Performance Standards**

The Cape Cod Commission, through its Regional Policy Plan for Barnstable County, has established overall planning goals and minimum performance standards for Wetlands. Eastham's goals and minimum performance standards are consistent with the Regional Policy Plan.

- 2.4.1 Goal:** To prevent loss or degradation of critical wildlife and plant habitat to minimize the impact of new development on wildlife and plant habitat and to maintain existing populations and species diversity.

#### Minimum Performance Standards

- 2.4.1.1 Developments shall be planned to minimize impacts to wildlife and plant habitat. Natural resources inventories shall be prepared in accordance with the Plant and Wildlife Habitat Assessment Guidelines, Technical Bulletin 92-002.
- 2.4.1.2 Clearing of vegetation and alteration of natural topography shall be minimized, with native vegetation planted as needed to enhance or restore wildlife habitat. Standing specimen trees shall be protected. The permitting authority may require designation of building envelopes (for structures, driveways, lawns, etc.), where appropriate, to limit removal of vegetation.
- 2.4.1.3 Fragmentation of wildlife and plant habitat shall be minimized by the establishment of greenways and wildlife corridors of sufficient width to protect not only edge species but also species that inhabit the interior forest, as well as by the protection of large unfragmented areas, and the use of open space or cluster development. Wildlife shall be provided with opportunities for passage under or across roads and through developments where such opportunities will maintain the integrity of wildlife corridors. Fencing shall not be constructed so as to interfere with identified wildlife migration corridors.
- 2.4.1.4 Developments that would adversely affect habitat of local populations of rare wildlife and plants shall not be permitted. Development may be permitted where the proponent can demonstrate that such development will not adversely affect such habitat. A wildlife and plant habitat management plan may be required as a condition of approval when development or redevelopment is permitted in critical wildlife and plant habitat areas.
- 2.4.1.5 Where a project site is located adjacent to a vernal pool (as defined herein) or within or adjacent to wetland-dependent rare species habitat, development shall be prohibited within a 350-foot undisturbed buffer around these wetland resources. New stormwater discharges shall be located a minimum of 100 feet from vernal pools.

- 2.4.1.6 Development on sites where a natural resources inventory identifies the presence of invasive plant species shall provide and implement a management and restoration plan detailing the management of, and where possible, the eradication of the invasive species present, and for revegetating the site with native species.

Other Development Review Policies

- 2.4.1.7 Measures to restore altered or degraded upland habitat areas should be encouraged where ecologically appropriate (e.g., sandplain grasslands, Pine Barrens, etc.).

**Existing Conditions**

Eastham's original forest was stripped in the early years of the area's settlement. With soil depletion from agricultural activities and wind action in exposed areas, along with frequent forest fires and repeated cutting, regrowth of most species has been inhibited. The present forests of the Cape are classified as pine-oak climax forests. The oak species most common include scrub oak, white oak, red oak and pin oak. The most prevalent pine variety is the pitch pine, which dominates this area characterized by poor dry soils. In addition to the forested areas, Eastham is also characterized by freshwater wetland and salt marsh vegetation as described in the previous section.

An unusually diverse array of coastal habitats provides for a correspondingly high diversity of coastal organisms. Outer Cape Cod, although somewhat isolated from the mainland, nevertheless attracts many "mainland" birds and mammals, and is especially important to migratory species. In addition, its unique geographical position and ocean-moderated climate are in part responsible for the presence of many plants and animals at the limits of their geographical range. A newcomer to the area, Eastern coyote populations have become well established in Eastham within the past ten years.

Wetlands and wetland-dependent flora and fauna predominate. Most important game animals, as well as "passively" enjoyed songbirds, raptors, colonial waterbirds, reptiles, amphibians and of course fish, depend on wetland habitats for food and cover. Coastal swamps, marshes and wet meadows are habitat for deer, muskrat, raccoon, red fox, cottontail rabbits, woodcock, and migratory waterfowl. The shrubby borders of coastal marshlands and kettlehole swamps provide outstandingly good feeding and nesting cover for songbirds and small mammals.

Several agencies are compiling and updating information on rare, threatened, or endangered species and many local people provide information to these agencies based on extensive local observation. Scientific staff of the Cape Cod National Seashore monitors rare species within the Park. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conducts field investigations on nationally significant species. The Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program (Department of Fisheries and Wildlife) maintains an ongoing inventory of rare, threatened and endangered plants and animal species, as well as the geographic locations of critical ecosystems. The review by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program shows Eastham to be important to a large number of state and/or federally designated rare, threatened or endangered "species."

## **Implementation**

### Recommended Town Actions

- A. Wetlands and vernal pool should be mapped, identified, and protected so as to maintain their ability to provide natural functions. Local schools should be encouraged to participate in this effort.
- B. Develop a review process for activities in critical plant and wildlife habitat areas that could adversely impact such habitat and/or seek designation as significant habitat areas under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act.
- C. Adopt by-laws/ordinances limiting land clearing and alteration of natural topography prior to development review.
- D. Conduct an analysis to assess potential growth impacts to wildlife and plant habitat areas, identifying those that are protected as well as those threatened by development. The map developed for the analysis should be used to develop strategies to address identified threats.

See “Wildlife and Habitat” and “Wetlands” in the Implementation section.

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